Tombstones, Texts, and Typologies: Seeing Sources for the Early History of Islam in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This article is a case study of an iconic symbol of Indonesian Islamization: the tombstones of al-Malik al-Sālih (d.696/1297 AD), believed to be the first Muslim Sultan of the polity of Samudra in Sumatra. The author questions the dominance of textualist approaches in Southeast Asian historical inquiry by applying the concept of the "integral cultural product"—in which text, visual content and material are equally important and interdependent. This fresh analysis suggests that al-Sālih's tombstones are actually later replacements for an older grave, so raising new questions about the construction of legitimacy and ancestry in early Islamic Southeast Asia.

Cette contribution étudie un symbole de l'islamisation indonésienne: les pierres tombales d'al-Malik al-Sālih (décédé en l'an 696/1297 ap. J.-C.) réputé être le premier sultan musulman du royaume de Samudra à Sumatra. L'auteur conteste la dominance de la méthode textualiste dans les recherches historiques sur l'Asie du Sud-est en utilisant le concept de "produit culturel intégral": le texte, l'aspect extérieur et la matière, interdépendants, doivent être analysés globalement. Cette approche nouvelle suggère que les pierres tombales d'al-Malik al-Sālih seraient effectivement des substituts tardifs d'un tombeau plus ancien, ce qui soulève des interrogations sur la construction de la légitimité et de l'ascendance à l'aube de l'ère islamique en Asie du Sud-est.

Introduction

Bridging the Divide—Inscriptions as Integral Cultural Products

Visual/textual, material/textual, non-verbal/verbal. These three pairings represent the efforts of various scholars, at various times, and in various contexts to define two distinct and yet ever elusive categories of action, thought, and analysis. Whatever the pair of terms chosen, however contentious or unsatisfactory their components may be, they all attempt to pin down a fundamental difference between artefacts and other categories of material and visual production that are not primarily textual or verbal, versus the many other categories of production that are. It is the difference between these two broadly defined fields of inquiry, the gap in the middle so to speak, as well as the complexities of their encounter in a single artefact, which forms the focus of this article. This paper is the first public expression of a dialogue that I have been engaged in over the last three or four years, with colleagues in various specializations of history from my standpoint of a material culture historian. If this dialogue has always been fascinating, it has not always been easy or equal. I have often found myself realizing how mysterious "our" most basic methods and approaches can seem to those outside "our" field of inquiry. I hope that the present discussion will broaden this dialogue further.

Although these pairings are not given as binary opposites—they are not meant to imply an impassable battle front between sources or disciplines—they nevertheless reflect what many feel to be a real separation of fields of inquiry. Only recently in her introduction to a collection of essays exploring the visual/textual interface in Islamic culture, suitably titled *Islamic Art and Literature*, Cynthia Robinson had to admit that "it would seem fair to say that, as far as existing and available literature is concerned, separation between visual and textual fields of inquiry remains prevalent" (Grabar and Robinson 2001: ix). There is no doubt that the extent of this separation varies considerably between regional specializations and between disciplines, and if it is very prevalent at the interface between Islamic literature and Islamic visual culture or "art," at other points it is far less marked. Historians of religion have made strong attempts to include visual and

material culture in their field of inquiry and the introduction to the first issue of the journal *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* illustrates this point.[1] Historians of Islamic Southeast Asia have also engaged with material remains in various ways but often, as we will see here with inscribed tombstones, one cannot help feeling that it is primarily for want of "proper" textual sources. Whether this forms an appropriate and thorough integration of material and visual culture into the field of Southeast Asian history is also one of the questions posed in this article. In spite of these integrations, it is probably not unfair to say that it is still relatively easy to work within one's own field of enquiry without ever dealing more than superficially with the sources and methods of the other.

Fortunately, certain categories of cultural product force, or at least invite, a merging of these fields of inquiry. In *Islamic Art and Literature* half of the essays deal with text—image—book relationships through illustrated manuscripts, albums, and single sheet paintings. Most build on the idea of the "whole book," an approach developed as recently as the mid-1990s that has attempted to bridge the separate fields of literary (textual) inquiry and visual and material culture, seeing books as "integral cultural products."[2] The idea of the "whole book" may seem all too obvious now, but it represented a significant conceptual shift in approaches to books. The idea of integral cultural products also helps to form more holistic approaches to other categories of artefacts which, like books, naturally fall across the visual/textual, material/textual, non-verbal/verbal fields of inquiry. The example at the core of this article is that of inscriptions and most specifically funerary inscriptions. Like books, inscriptions are both texts and material and visual artefacts. Once again, this may seem patently obvious yet inscriptions have still overwhelmingly tended to be studied as text. Even if epigraphic analysis includes visual and material aspects such as the particular style of script and techniques of inscription, broader discussions of the whole inscription as one cultural product are undertaken only infrequently.[3]

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[1] See Goa 2004.

[2] See Nichols and Wenzel 1996.

[3] By contrast to the situation for Southeast Asia, scholars from a range of historical specializations have been pleading for a greater recognition of inscriptions as texts. For their use in African history, see Henige 2005: 185-97; for the value of inscriptions to the history of Buddhist religion, see Schopen 1997.

Tombstones as Text and the History of Early Islam in Southeast Asia

Inscribed tombstones have played a central role in discussions of early Islamic Southeast Asia. Surprisingly little is known about the early history of Islam in the region, even though today it is home to an estimated 206 million Muslims, about 20% of the world's ca. 1.2 billion Muslims.[4] Although it is commonly agreed that substantial local conversions only began in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries AD—thus comparatively "late" compared to the Islamization of the Arabian Peninsula itself, the Middle East, and adjacent areas such as North Africa or Iran—even after more than a century of research the period before 1500 AD is still tantalizingly obscure.

Early conversion processes, as always, remain notoriously hard to track although the implantation of Islam in Southeast Asia has been convincingly linked to the increasing dominance of Muslim trade networks. More fundamentally perhaps, many historical "basics" are still lacking: we also have only the vaguest grasp of the dynastic chronologies of the early Muslim port polities that grew up along the north Sumatran and Javanese coasts, if indeed they were organized along dynastic models. We know preciously little about the relations between these communities and polities within maritime Southeast Asia, and just as little about their relations with the wider Islamic and Indian Ocean worlds. The deeper economic, social, cultural, and religious history of these communities and polities is almost a closed book. The problems to writing these histories are multiple, for the particular regional traits of history writing mean that what Islamicists would call "proper" dynastic histories were only written, if at all, from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries AD onward; earlier texts merge history with myth and oral tradition but are, in any case, only known through early nineteenth century copies. Geographical literature and travellers' accounts by contrast provide some of the best details, whatever the problems of reliability they bring. There are no standing monuments earlier than the sixteenth century, no foundation inscriptions, and no visual records of earlier architecture or urban forms. Although important archaeological data does exist—the result of both surface surveys and excavations—it is probably fair to say that archaeology has still not been used systematically as a resource for the study of this period.[5]

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[4] Data from Jackson and Fealy 2003: 2.

[5] Important field surveys in Sumatra have been undertaken over the last 30 years by Edmund McKinnon and published in various journals, see in particular his 1986 PhD on

Fortunately, both north Sumatra and the north Javanese coast are particularly rich in one resource, early Islamic cemeteries. Under the Dutch Colonial authorities, massive documentation projects were undertaken of Indonesian archaeological remains and these surveys revealed, not only the cemeteries themselves, but the existence of many detailed epitaphs among the gravestones. These dated epitaphs offered some of the hard data that historians so craved and, in the absence of early written histories, came to occupy a central position in historical research and debate about early Islamic Southeast Asia. Since the late nineteenth century when these Islamic cemeteries began to be systematically documented and studied, tombstones have occupied a central role in discussions of the history of the early Sumatran and Javanese port polities, and the question of the Islamization of these regions more generally. As this article will demonstrate, key articles in 1912 and 1913 by the Dutch scholar Jean-Pierre Moquette on the gravestones of the Sultans of Samudra-Pasai set agendas and assumptions that still prevail in much research today. In present-day Brunei, inscribed tombstones still play a key role in building dynastic history.

The centrality of Islamic tombstones and inscriptions also extends to the pre-Islamic history of Southeast Asia. In the 1920s discussions about early sojourning communities crystallized around a number of inscriptions and tombstones from coastal Vietnam and Java which suggested the presence of what were described as "foreign" Muslim communities (Moquette 1921; Ravaisse 1922 and 1925). Uncertainty about the authenticity of the stones and the validity of their evidence is still the focus of hot debate. Claude Guillot and Ludvik Kalus have recently revived earlier queries, provocatively arguing that these inscriptions are the result of the transport of stone ballast rather than original commissions for early Muslim sojourners in the region, and are thus without value for the history of early Islam in Southeast Asia (Kalus and Guillot 2003 and 2004). In myriad ways then, tombstones have been central to discussions of the history of early Islam and Muslim polities in Southeast Asia and it is practically impossible to pick up a history of the region without finding at least one reference to a particular early royal tombstone or the grave of an Islamizing *wali*.[6]

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the port of Kota Cina. For the rewards of archaeological research where textual and historical sources are all but lacking, see Miksic 2004: 191-210. More recently extensive Franco-Indonesian excavations have been undertaken at the port of Barus on the west coast of Sumatra, see Guillot 2003: 30.

[6]　The best survey and analysis of the use of material culture and especially tombstones in the study of early Islam in Southeast Asia, at least up until the late 1960s, is still Drewes 1968.

This centrality is, however, only apparent; although tombstones have been at the heart of debates about early Islamic Southeast Asia, in reality the potential data they provide has barely been exploited. Those who have recorded and researched these early Islamic cemeteries have overwhelmingly been historians and epigraphers, who are firmly rooted in textual approaches to the writing of history. Yet only a fraction of the grave markers in these cemeteries are actually inscribed and thus viable as textual sources. Of these inscribed stones, only a few carry the hard data—names and dates—that make them useful historical sources. Masses of uninscribed stones were simply ignored in the early Dutch surveys, being only accidentally captured in general landscape shots. In effect, research on Islamic tombstones and cemeteries has focused on the search for hard epigraphic data with which to bolster fragile, or even non-existent, dynastic histories. This has taken place at the expense of the vast amount of non-textual data they do contain. In an obvious chain reaction, the agendas about early Islam in Southeast Asia have in turn been skewed by this textualist and epigraphic focus. To a very large degree this reflects the overly textual emphasis that dominated the early scholarship on Indonesian Islam and the linguistic and philological training of many researchers of the colonial period. The scholarly treatment of the tombstones of al-Malik al-Sālih, the "iconic" first Muslim Sultan of Samudra, illustrates this problem very vividly.

Origins and Returns: The Grave of "The King Who First Embraced Islam in the Land of Pasai"

After the conquest of Aceh by the Dutch in the late nineteenth century, the colonial archaeological authorities undertook a massive documentation of archaeological remains in north Sumatra.[7] During the course of

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[7] Some of the most significant cemeteries are found around present-day Lhok Seumawe associated with the Sultanate of Samudra (late thirteenth to early sixteenth century), other large cemeteries around Banda Aceh belong to the period of the Aceh Sultanate (early sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), both these groups were extensively documented by the Dutch archaeological authorities (de Vink 1912-14 and 1914-17). However, the Dutch documentation of these two sites and even the small amount of publications this has generated has probably overshadowed the existence of significant early tombstone groups at other sites. French work at Barus (Guillot 2003) on the northwest coast has highlighted the significant cemeteries there whilst important new research by Montana (1997) and Edmund McKinnon (1986) has revealed extensive though badly damaged early cemeteries at Lhok Cut, Kota Lhubok, and Ujung Kapee Batal, probably associated with the as yet poorly understood polity of Lamri.

this process two imposing tombstone pairs came to light near the village of Beuringin, in Samudra district, about 14 kilometers from the modern industrial city of Lhok Seumawe (Figure 1). The two gravestone pairs could not have been more different: one was carved from a fine-grained brown sandstone in the familiar *batu Aceh* (Aceh stone) shape, finely carved, and heavily inscribed; the other was almost pillar-like in form, topped by a pointed "pommel," sparsely inscribed, and sparingly carved from a dark grey granite (Ambary 1984: 98). But to the delight of historians, their epitaphs were found to record the deaths of the earliest recorded Muslim Sultans of Samudra: Sultān al-Malik al-Sālih, who died in the month of *Ramadān* 696/June–July 1297 (Figures 2 and 3) and next to him his son and successor al-Sultān al-Malik al-Zāhir, who died on 12 *Dhū al-Hijja* 726/9 November 1326. It is this gravestone pair of al-Malik al-Sālih, famously remembered as "the king who first embraced Islam in the land of Pasai," which forms the focus of this article.

Figure 1: Contemporary view of the grave markers of al-Malik al-Sālih (right) and al-Malik al-Zāhir (left) near the village of Beuringin, Samudra district, Aceh. (Photograph courtesy of Edmund McKinnon).
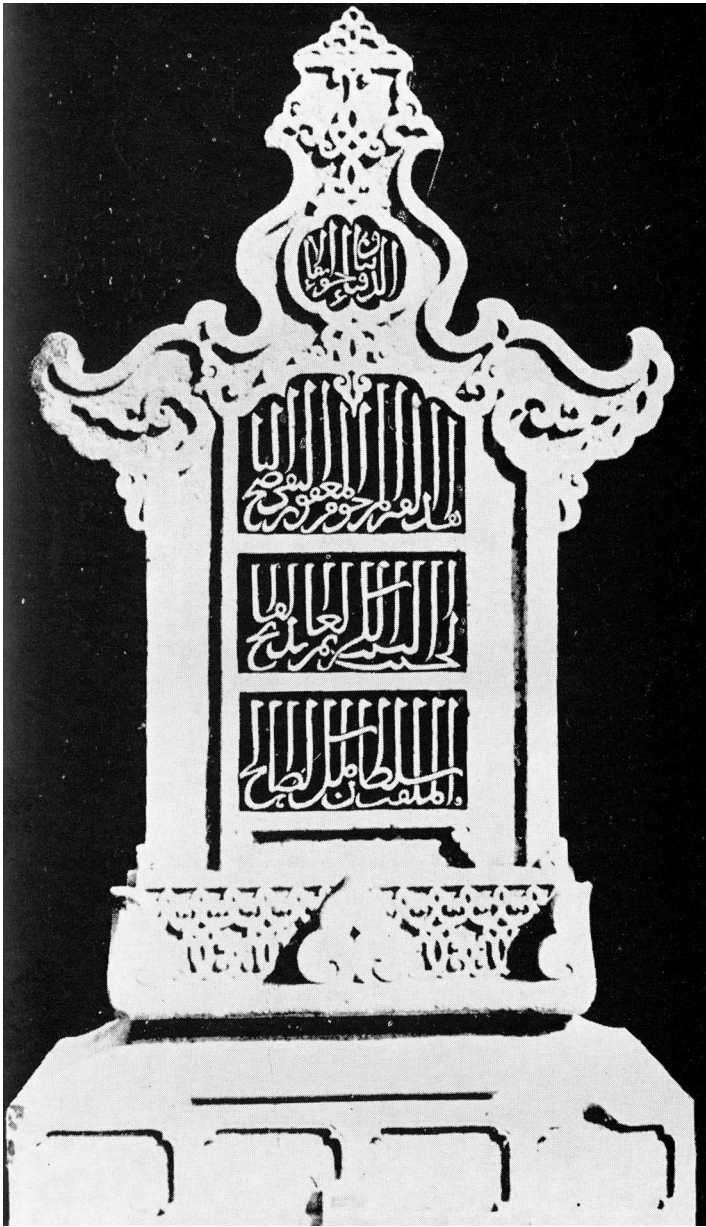
Figure 2: Headstone of Sultān al-Malik al-Sālih, d. *Ramadān* 696/ 23 June–22 July 1297, Samudra district, Aceh. Photograph reworked in ink to enhance the inscription. (From Moquette 1913).

Figure 3: Side of the headstone of Sultān al-Malik al-Sālih, giving his date
of death in *Ramadān* 696/23 June–22 July 1297, Samudra district, Aceh.
With drawing of the inscription panel. (From Moquette 1913).

The two stones not only supported each others' story—al-Malik al-Zāhir's
nasab or line of descent clearly indicates that he is al-Sālih's son—the names
mentioned also corresponded to information supplied in two indigenous
dynastic histories, the *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* or *Story of the Pasai Rulers*,
and the *Sulalat al-Salatin*, which tell the story of "the king who first
embraced Islam in the land of Pasai" (*Hikayat* 1960: 109).[8] The *Hikayat
Raja-raja Pasai* is currently believed to be a text of late fourteenth or
fifteenth century composition and relates how a Sumatran prince named
Merah Silu was converted to Islam by a certain Shaykh Ismāʿīl who had

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[8] The history known as the *Sejarah Melayu* seems to have been a Malay retranslation of the
Leyden/Raffles English translation "Malay Annals," and should more correctly be referred
to as the *Sulalat al-Salatin*.

sailed to Sumatra from Mecca. Upon his conversion Merah Silu received the *laqab* al-Malik al-Sālih and was awarded a variety of symbols of investiture. The King had two sons, al-Malik al-Zāhir and al-Malik al-Mansūr, to whom he bequeathed two kingdoms, Samudra and Pasai, now generally conflated into one name Samudra-Pasai (*Hikayat* 1960). The correspondence between the names given in these two epitaphs and the hitherto semi-mythical early rulers of the Sultanate mentioned in the *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* and the *Sulalat al-Salatin* confirmed to western scholars the historical potential of these cemeteries, providing the much yearned for hard dates to which the conversion of the rulers of Samudra could be anchored. Islamic rule in Samudra now had a start date. The two pairs of tombstones were published by Jean-Pierre Moquette in 1913 in an article entitled "De eerste vorsten van Samoedra-Pase (Nord-Sumatra)" or "The First Sovereigns of Samudra-Pasai (North Sumatra)" (Moquette 1913).

In 1913 the two grave memorials were mainly valued as repositories of a text, the epitaph, which supplied "hard" epigraphic data with which to bolster a fragile historic and dynastic framework. Although these two tombstones have been cited and discussed countless times since this first publication, almost a century ago now, in many respects they are still trapped in this textualist approach.

The Trouble with al-Sālih's Tombstones

When al-Sālih's gravestones were first published by Jean-Pierre Moquette as belonging to "the king who first embraced Islam in the land of Pasai," he declared them to have been imported from the port of Cambay in Gujarat, western India (1913: 9). Moquette, picking up a suggestion first made two years earlier by Van Ronkel that the gravestone of Malik Ibrāhīm at Gresik would prove to be of Indian origin, had just been able to demonstrate that both this grave and the grave memorial of a daughter of Sultān Zayn al-ʿAbidīn of Samudra-Pasai who died in 831/1428 (Figure 4) were identical to marble graves from Cambay, and had been imported from western India (Moquette 1912). In his enthusiasm for the historical potential of tombstones, and with apparently little or no visual training, Moquette failed to see the striking differences in material and style between al-Sālih's tombstones (Figures 2 and 3) and the Cambay graves in Southeast Asia (Figure 4). Cambay stones are carved in a fine white marble, al-Sālih's are carved in a yellowish sandstone, Cambay headstones are large, thin arched slabs over a meter high, al-Sālih's stones are short thick slabs with swooping
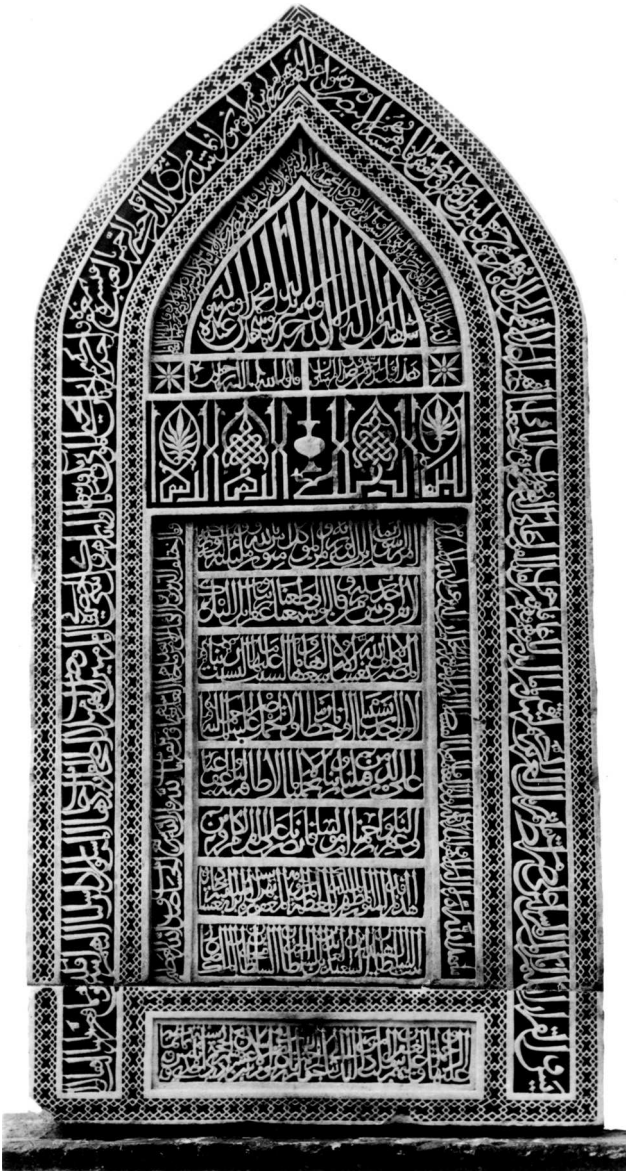
Figure 4: Headstone commemorating a daughter of Sultān Zayn al-ʿAbidīn, d. 831/1428. White marble, imported from Cambay in Gujarat. (Or.23.481, photograph 79. Leiden University Library, Legatum Warnerianum. The Netherlands).

extensions at the shoulder of the stone, known locally as *subang* or "earrings," and ornate "crowns."[9] The stones also differ significantly in decoration and script: Cambay grave memorials carry several distinctive designs, either rows of low-relief carved trees and lamps, a fabulous floriated Kufic *bismillāh*, or simple bands of interlace design, al-Sālih's tombstones carry none of these; the calligraphic style of both groups also differs significantly.

Whilst Cambay grave memorials were indeed imported for use by the ruling elite of Samudra-Pasai in the first half of the fifteenth century, and even travelled as far as eastern Java, Cambay production is now well understood and it is clear that al-Sālih's tombstones bear no relationship whatsoever to any South Asian tombstones (Lambourn 2003). In fact, with their "earrings," and ornate "crowns," al-Sālih's tombstones clearly belong within the north Sumatran tradition of tombstone production known by the "catch all" label *batu Aceh*, or Aceh stones.

If Moquette failed to see the material and stylistic inconsistencies in his comparison, he was clearly more perturbed by the large gap of over a century between the date of al-Sālih's death, given as 696/1297 in his epitaph, and the date of the first known Cambay imports, established as sometime in the early fifteenth century based on the dates spanning 1407 to 1428 given in the epitaphs of various Cambay imports in Pasai and Gresik. On this basis, he suggested that al-Sālih's tombstones had been set up at some unspecified time after his death (1913: 9), although he still believed them to have been imported from Gujarat.

Moquette's reasoning is a fascinating illustration of the dominance of historical training over visual and material culture skills. He clearly identified the potential chronological inconsistencies of his theory, if al-Sālih's tombstones were imported from Cambay there was a gap of over 130 years between the date of his death and the other documented Cambay imports, but was literally blind to the far more serious typological inconsistencies, of material, form, and style, between al-Sālih's tombstones and documented Cambay production. Be that as it may, whatever hesitations Moquette felt about pinning al-Sālih's tombstones down to a particular time and place, later scholars enthusiastically over-rode these reservations to conclude that, in Drewes's words, "the oldest known gravestone comes from Gujarat, so Islam also comes from Gujarat" (1968: 444). Obviously

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[9] For this local terminology, at least as known during the nineteenth century, see Snouck Hurgronje 1906: I: 431.

the idea of Islam originating from a single source has long been discounted and scholarship is now aware of the complexity of Islamization processes and the involvement of multiple centers over a long period. Nevertheless, this assumption gave birth to one of the most longstanding misunderstandings about the origin of al-Sālih's stones and with them the "origins" of Islam in Southeast Asia, a leap in logic which still reoccurs in discussions today.[10]

To a historian of material culture or archaeologist, Moquette's failure to see the differences between al-Sālih's stones and those produced at Cambay, as well as their likeness to the general *batu Aceh* group, is very difficult to understand since these are so glaringly obvious. But this blindness also usefully illustrates the extent to which the ability to "see" style, shape, and material is not an innate part of "seeing" but the result of visual training. It is also one of the most difficult specialized skills involved in archaeology and material culture studies to demonstrate to those in other specializations. Whilst historians can clearly demonstrate their skills by reading and analyzing a written source or set of data, or linguists can clearly show mastery over a particular language through their ability to read, write, or speak it, archaeologists and historians of material culture regularly face the problem of how to demonstrate the skills of visual analysis and comprehension that they (we) posses. Every sighted person can see but not everyone can "see" in the way that archaeologists and historians of material culture are able to perceive and analyze a range of visual characteristics. In my personal experience, this is the most frequent and problematic aspect of cross-disciplinary communication.

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[10] Both Drewes and Fatimi give helpful summaries of the genealogy of the Gujarati hypothesis principally through the writings of R. A. Kern (in his 1930 contribution on the introduction of Islam to Stapel's *Geschiedenis van Nederlansch Indië*; and the book *De Islam in Indonesië*), as well as Winstedt, Gonda, and Bousquet see Fatimi 1963: 31-3 and Drewes 1968: 444-5. This assumption has been so widespread that it is impossible to collate all the instances in which it occurs, however, the introduction to *Islam in the Indonesian Social Context* in 1991 admirably illustrates how these hearsays have been perpetuated even in relatively recent scholarship. "The earliest substantial evidence of local Muslims or the establishment of Islamic states (as opposed to the burial of foreign Muslims in Indonesia) dates from late thirteenth century Sumatra. Both a report by Marco Polo (AD 1292) and the gravestone of Sultan Malik al-Salih (d. AH 696/AD 1297) show that Islam was putting down local roots there. Two important points need to be made about this early Sumatran evidence. Firstly, the gravestone of Malik al-Salih is perhaps of Indian origin." (Rickleffs 1991: 1). For a resolution of the question of what exactly constitutes a Cambay tombstone, see Lambourn 2003.

Al-Sālih's Tombstones and Batu Aceh Typologies

Moquette's idea about a later date of manufacture for al-Sālih's tombstone turns out to be right, although not based on the correct reasoning. With the majority of tombstones, one can generally assume that the date of death indicated in the epitaph gives a rough indication of the date of manufacture to perhaps within a few years or a decade.[11] However, this is not always true, particularly in the case of the graves of revered saints or other popular figures for whom devotees or successors might wish to commission new grave markers. Unfortunately we have no textual sources recounting when al-Sālih's tombstones were manufactured, however, by using basic techniques of typological sequencing we can fix their date of manufacture to a relatively precise time frame.

At the heart of the discussion that is about to follow is a key method used in archaeology and material culture history, that of typological sequences.[12] Typology is one of the empirical tools at the heart of material culture analysis and relies on the basic notion that, as explained in one of the core archaeology textbooks currently in use in the United Kingdom, "products of a given period and place have a recognizable style" (Renfrew and Bahn 2004: 124). Artefacts bearing similar attributes of shape, decoration, and material can thus be grouped together and regarded as a type—in short "like goes with like." Based on the generally observable phenomenon that "the change in style (shape and decoration) of artefacts is often quite gradual, or evolutionary" (Renfrew and Bahn 2004: 125) different types can then be arranged into a sequence—giving a typological

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[11] Data for the thirteenth century is lacking but Snouck Hurgronje and a number of ethnographers and travelers have recorded nineteenth century Acehnese and Malay practices of placing temporary markers on graves until permanent stones could be erected. For Aceh, Snouck Hurgronje emphasizes the importance of the *pula batee* ceremony, or planting of the stones, on either the forty-fourth or one-hundredth day after burial. However, he also highlights that this could be "postponed for a considerable time" either for financial reasons or "because the season *musem piche' blang* forbids it" (1906: 430). In effect, in Aceh the land was closed *musem piche* or *kot blang* for more or less eight months of the year, roughly from June to January, and open for the remaining four months, after the rice harvest had taken place. As Snouck Hurgronje explains "the *musém luaïh blang*, the period of the year when the land stands open to men and cattle, is also the appointed time for the setting up of tomb-stones" (1906: I: 259).

[12] This article does not enter into the background of the fierce "typological debate" that raged, especially in American archaeology, through the 1960s and 70s. As many commentators have noted, in spite of the ongoing debates about the value of making types, archaeologists still sort their material into types and use these to make relative chronologies (witness Renfrew and Bahn's 2004 textbook cited here in the main text).

sequence—enabling the archaeologist or historian of material culture to date individual artefacts or groups relative to each other. The typological method was developed and perfected during the nineteenth century and its core assumptions have been proved to be generally true of many categories of artefact when cross-checked by other methods such as stratigraphy, documentary evidence, and especially the new range of scientific techniques such a carbon-14 dating. Typological sequencing works best with large groups of objects—typically ceramic shards or stone tools—and the large numbers of grave memorials in north Sumatra thus make this an unusually appropriate method. It is therefore all the more surprising that the typological method has not been applied more rigorously to these important tombstones. The following discussion demonstrates the problems and rewards of this most primary of methods.

The important first work of establishing a typological sequence for *batu Aceh* was undertaken by the Malaysian scholar Mohammad Othman Yatim in his 1988 book *Batu Aceh*: *Early Islamic Gravestones in Peninsular Malaysia* and the results of his work are illustrated here in Figure 5 (Othman Yatim 1988). Although his study focused on Peninsular Malaysia, Othman Yatim recognized that north Sumatra was the principal center of production of many *batu Aceh* and so integrated north Sumatran examples into his types and sequence.[13] Like Moquette, Othman Yatim also hinted at a possible discrepancy between the date of al-Sālih's death and the actual period of manufacture of the tombstones, but he skirted the issue (Othman Yatim 1988: 47). The reticence of these, and other, scholars to push this observation to its logical conclusion, appears to stem from a profound unease with disturbing what had quickly become an "icon" of early Sumatran Islamization. To question the date of manufacture of the tombstones is obviously to question the epitaph itself, and with it one of the earliest dates in the Islamic history of the region.

There is no doubt that al-Sālih's tombstones belong broadly within the *batu Aceh* tradition, but, as the typologies make clear, "earrings" and "crowns" alone do not define *batu Aceh* very efficiently since a number of grave marker shapes of different periods—Types A, C, H, and N—share these features (Figure 5). It is increasingly clear that the types proposed so far are still very broad and require considerable fine-tuning; currently each type

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[13] Mohammad Othman Yatim's work is especially valuable for having looked across the Malacca Straits to north Sumatra. A number of revised or alternative *batu Aceh* typologies have since been published but they are constructed on data from fieldwork in Johore State in Malaysia, see Perret, Razak and Kalus 1999 and 2004, and Perret and Razak 2003.
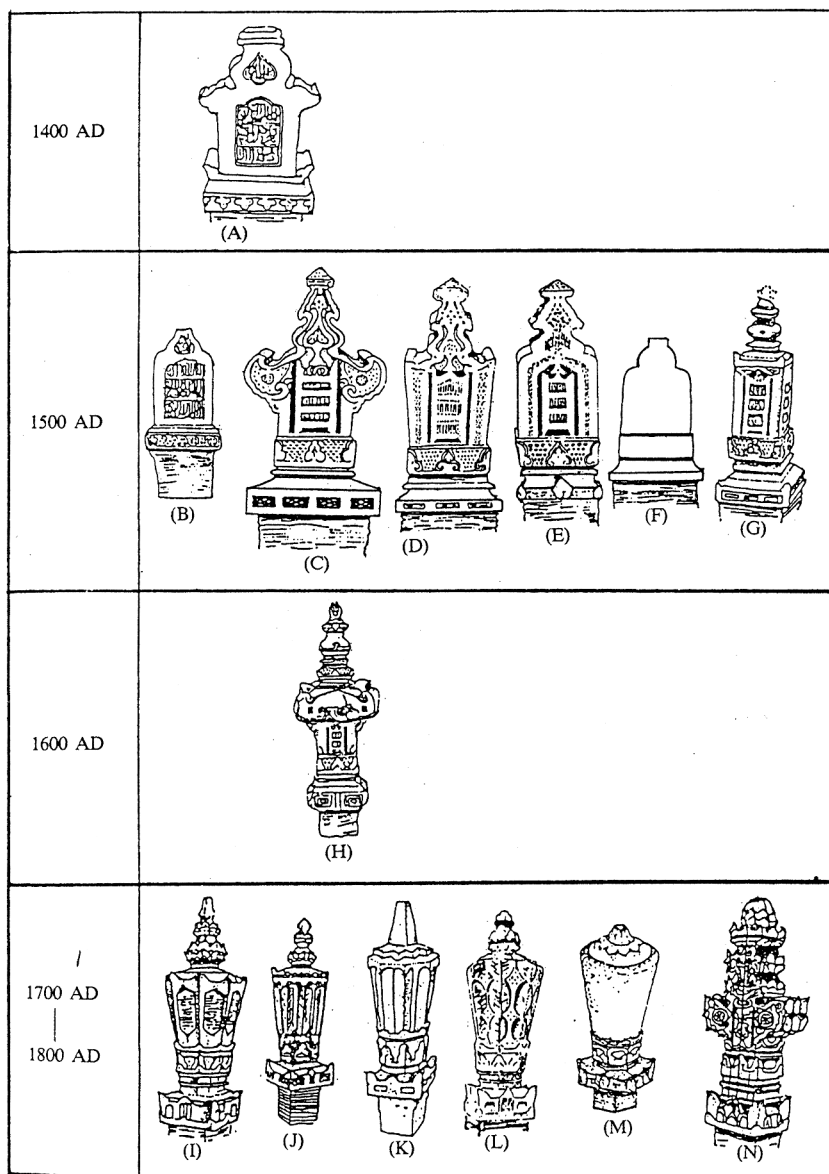
Figure 5: Current *batu Aceh* typology from Othman Mohd. Yatim (Figure 4, 1988).

subsumes an enormous range of variation and needs better definition if it is to serve any useful purpose, the present article goes some way toward beginning this process.

As Othman Yatim's typological sequence makes clear, the earliest gravestones with "earrings" and "crowns"—Type A—were only manufactured from around 1400 AD onward, and more recent research suggests that this may in fact need to be narrowed further to the early 840s AH, that is the late 1430s AD (Lambourn 2004a: 238 and Table 2). Either way, it is abundantly clear that al-Sālih's stones do not belong to the Type A category as defined by Othman Yatim. If one compares al-Sālih's tombstones to a typical Type A stone such as grave VII at Kuta Kareueung—the main burial ground for the later Sultans and royal family of Samudra-Pasai—which commemorates a death in *Shawwāl* 841/March–April 1438, strong differences are immediately apparent (compare Figures 2 and 6). At a very basic level, the shape of al-Sālih's stones is far more ornate, *rococo* even, than any Type A stone and this extends to the treatment of the borders around the text panels and the general level of decoration; the style of script on al-Sālih's stones is also lighter and more spidery than that found on the majority of Type A stones.

The specific decoration and calligraphy of al-Malik al-Sālih's stones are closest to an even later refinement of this basic tombstone shape, classified under current typologies as Type C and broadly attributed to the sixteenth century (see Type C in Figure 5). Type C has the more ornate *rococo* outline of al-Sālih's stones and a far more elaborate interior detailing around the text panels which again corresponds more closely to the treatment of al-Sālih's stones than the otherwise quite sparse Type A. However, it is a reflection of the problems with existing typologies that al-Sālih's stones still do not quite fit within the current Type C either. The crown on al-Sālih's stones is less pronounced than that on the archetypal Type C and its decoration, whilst ornate, is less tightly organized; the style of calligraphy is also substantially less crowded.

It is at this stage that further, detailed comparisons of style, epigraphic program, material, and epitaph within Type C stones becomes difficult. Paradoxically, the profusion of dynastic histories, seals, coins, and other documents for these later periods seems to have robbed the associated tombstones of their central importance as "text," meaning that Type C is still relatively poorly documented and understood within north Sumatra. The following is therefore a first attempt to locate al-Sālih's tombstones more tightly within the current Type C group.

Although several tombstones display almost identical characteristics of shape, decoration, and/or script to al-Sāliḥ's, the problem is that they are either damaged, unread, or undated, and sometimes a mixture of these.[14] The earliest dated example of this genre of design belongs to the badly damaged headstone of Sultān Manṣūr Shāh of Malacca who died in *Rajab* 882, equivalent to 9 October–7 November 1477 (Figures 7a & b). Enough survives to indicate that Manṣūr Shāh's headstone has the same distinctive elaboration of the frame around the inscription. Traces of comparable outward curling earrings can just be seen to the right and left of the central panel, exactly as on al-Sāliḥ's tombstones (see Figure 7b). The almost spidery script with few vowels or diacriticals and an emphasis on long hastae organized into a rhythmic backdrop of vertical parallels is also comparable. Al-Sāliḥ's and Manṣūr Shāh's stones further share the same Arabic poem about the transitory nature of life and in both examples the date of death is inscribed on the side of the tombstone rather than its main face.

Two later tombstones in far better condition are preserved in the Kuta Alam cemetery, reserved for Aceh's Sultans and family members, just outside Banda Aceh. Grave III is damaged but nonetheless a close match for al-Sāliḥ's stones both in shape, style of decoration, and calligraphy. Although the epitaph has not been fully read, the date of death has fortunately survived on a side panel giving the phrase *sana sabʿat ʿashar wa tisʿmāʾia* or seventeen and nine hundred: 917 AH is equivalent to 1511-2 AD. The adjacent tombstone, grave IV, is complete and provides a very close parallel although its date has unfortunately remained unread at present (Figure 8). The calligraphy of both stones is closely comparable to that on al-Sāliḥ's

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[14] A very close parallel to al-Sāliḥ's tombstones is the footstone marking the grave of Sultan ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ibn Manṣūr Shāh ibn Muzaffar Shāh of Malacca who died in 1488 AD and whose grave is located at Kampong Raja in Johor. Unfortunately, there are some problems with the dating of this footstone since it does not match the headstone with which it is currently paired, and which critically carries ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's name and date of death. While the calligraphy of both head and foot stone is identical, the headstone shape differs substantially from that of the footstone. Since the tombstone pair is likely to have been manufactured in north Sumatra and then shipped across the Straits, one possible explanation is that an older blank tombstone was re-used for the headstone whilst a new footstone was carved from scratch. The Cambay workshops were certainly very inventive in their reuse of older gravestone elements when they exported to Samudra-Pasai earlier in the same century (Lambourn 2003). However, it is possible that the entire Kampong Raja site is extremely disturbed and that a mass of fallen tombstones were reset at some later period, not necessarily in the pairs they originally formed.

Figure 6: Type A *batu Aceh*, Grave VII, Kuta Kareueng, commemorating a death in *Shawwāl* 841/28 March–25 April 1438. (Or.23.481, photograph 59*. Leiden University Library, Legatum Warnerianum. The Netherlands).

Figure 7a & b: The two faces of the mutilated headstone of Sultān Mansūr Shāh of Malacca d. *Rajab* 882/9 October–7 November 1477, Raffles Museum, Singapore.

tombstones. Significantly perhaps these graves also appear to mark the graves of Sultans or their family members, they are thus elite burial places.[15]

Al-Sālih's stones thus belong to a small group of *batu Aceh* with general Type C characteristics—whatever the problems of this definition at present—which were manufactured to commemorate the deaths of a number of elite individuals on both sides of the Straits of Malacca between 1477 and 1512 AD. It is currently unclear where in north Sumatra they were manufactured since this fifty year bracket straddles the decline of the Sultanate of Samudra-Pasai and the simultaneous rise of the Sultanate of Aceh, ending with the conquest of Samudra by Aceh in 1524 AD. Aspects of the script relate to tombstones belonging to the later Sultans of Samudra-Pasai and the stones could just as easily have been produced in the closing years of this Sultanate, as during the early years of the Sultanate of Aceh.

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[15] Other Type C stones have been recorded in the cemeteries at Kampung Pande and Darul Kamal, both around Banda Aceh, and smaller groups at Pidie on the east coast and in the Daya *kabupaten* (regency) on the west coast, however, it is not clear which variant of Type C they belong to (Othman Yatim 1988: 36).

Figure 8: Early 16th century gravestone, Grave III, Kuta Alam, Aceh (Or.23.481, photograph 921. Leiden University Library, Legatum Warnerianum. The Netherlands). Closely comparable to a neighbouring but damaged stone dated 917/1511-12.

New Gravestones for "the king who first embraced Islam in the land of Pasai"

Clearly current *batu Aceh* typologies require considerable refinement and centers of production need to be located. However, this is not really the most important point here, what does matter is that this basic typological sequencing is still sufficient to demonstrate that al-Sālih's tombstones were not made in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, that is immediately after his death, nor were they imported from Gujarat. Al-Sālih's tombstones do not provide valid information about tombstone production, styles of script, or carving in late thirteenth century Samudra and, most importantly, the epitaph they carry is not contemporary with his death. Comparative analysis suggests that al-Sālih's gravestones were probably manufactured sometime between the 1470s and the 1520s, that is, some two centuries after his death; in all probability they replaced an earlier memorial that had become eroded or worn, which was a common practice with important graves. Moquette's feeling that al-Sālih's tombstones somehow did not fit was partly correct; however, the solution was not that the stones were later imports but rather that they were of later manufacture. The iconic grave of "the king who first embraced Islam in the land of Pasai" (*Hikayat* 1960: 109) is not quite what it seemed. So what can we trust?

An Old Epitaph for the First King

Much about the creation of al-Sālih's grave memorial remains speculation. We do not know for sure that earlier grave markers did exist; if they did we can only speculate as to what the new set of tombstones borrowed in terms of shape and decoration and what they added. If they did not exist, we still have to wonder about where the information included in the epitaph might have come from.

To date no earlier Islamic tombstones have been identified in the cemeteries in the Samudra district, thus we cannot look to any surviving precedents for clues to the present design of al-Sālih's grave memorial. What is certain is that his tombstones differ in every way from those of his successor al-Zāhir, as well as from the earliest known *batu Aceh* (see Type A in Figure 5 and Figure 6) (Lambourn 2004a). However, the text of the epitaph provides some clues to the genesis of the new tombstones.

First of all, it is useful to review the full text of the epitaph as it survives on the face of the headstone, and on the two panels on either side of the stone; it reads:

Line 1. hadhā al-qabr al-marhūm al-maghfūr al-taqī al-nāsih
Line 2. al-hasīb al-nasīb al-karīm al-ʿābid al-fātih
Line 3. al-mulaqqab bi-sultān malik al-sālih
Line 4. al-ladhī intaqala min ramadān sanna sitt was tisʿīn wa sittimāʾia min intiqāl al-nabawiyya
Line 5. isqā allāh tharāhu wa jaʿala al-janna mabwāhu bi-hurmatin lā illāha ilá allāh muḥammad rasūl allāh[16]

Line 1. This is the grave of the one taken into [Allah's] mercy and pardoned, the devout, the sincere,
Line 2. the esteemed, the noble, the distinguished, the conqueror,
Line 3. Entitled Sultān Malik al-Sālih
Line 4. Who passed away in *Ramadān* in the year six and ninety and six hundred of the *intiqāl* of the Prophet
Line 5. May Allah water his resting place and make Paradise his sacred abode, there is no God but Allah Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah

Most aspects of the epitaph text follow standard Islamic medieval forms and might thus be the result of composition at any period. However, the epitaph displays two unusual features. The first is the atypically brief nature of al-Sālih's name, he is simply recorded as *mulaqqab*, i.e. bearing the *laqab* or title, al-Malik al-Sālih. This brevity contrasts with the extremely detailed name information usually given in Islamic inscriptions and epitaphs, particularly for persons of high rank. By this period we would expect to find his personal name or *ism*, his titles or *laqab*, a *kunya*, possibly a *nisba* or adjective of relation, and his line of descent or *nasab*. The epitaph of his successor al-Malik al-Zāhir, who is buried next to him, is a model of the genre supplying the information that he is the Sultan son of the Sultan, bearing the *laqab* al-Malik al-Zāhir, the personal name or *ism* Muhammad, the *kunya* Shams al-Dunya wa al-Dīn, and finally the *nasab* son of al-Malik al-Sālih. By contrast we do not even know al-Sālih's personal name or the name of his father. Al-Sālih is quite literally the first king of Samudra, a founding father with no ancestors himself.

The failure to even attempt to provide some ancestry or *nasab* seems particularly noteworthy as converts to Islam frequently used the option of giving their father's name as ʿAbdallāh, the slave of God, a coded way of meeting the requirements of *nasab* or descent, without admitting too openly that their father had not been a Muslim. One possibility is that the

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[16] This line has previously been treated as a random benedictory phrase but it makes best sense as the concluding line of the epitaph.

name is so perfunctory because information about this early monarch had been all but lost by the later fifteenth century. It might have been retrieved from oral traditions or from another written source such as the nearby epitaph of his successor al-Malik al-Zāhir (d. 726/1326). However, this scenario does not necessarily explain the preservation of information about his exact date of death. Another possibility is that it was copied from an earlier epitaph and that Muslim naming systems were only beginning to be adopted in late thirteenth century Sumatra. This first sovereign's Muslim name was only Sultan al-Malik al-Sālih. At around the same time, the tombstones of one of the first Muslim rulers of Brunei give his name simply as Mahārājā Burnī and even omit the date of his death (Chen 1992). A more extreme example is that of two twelfth century Maldivian land grants for the maintenance of newly founded mosques, which include no Muslim names or titles, even for the recently converted Muslim monarch who had instituted the grants (Maniku, 1982; Maniku and Wijayawardhana 1986).

Another point in favor of an earlier epitaph having been recopied is the unusual terminology employed for the era of al-Sālih's death, given as 696 years *min intiqāl al-nabawiyya*. This phraseology contrasts with the more usual phrase *min al-hijra al-nabawiyya* "from the migration of the Prophet" to indicate the standard start date for the Islamic calendar from the migration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in the equivalent of 622 AD. The literal meaning of *intiqāl* is "migration" and Moquette followed Van Ronkel in reading this as an alternative expression of the more usual term *hijra*. However, in *Islam Comes to Malaysia*, S. Q. Fatimi discusses the possibility of *intiqāl* as signifying "passing away" or "death" and indicating a calculation from the death of the Prophet in the equivalent of 633 AD. Accordingly, Fatimi gives two possible equivalences for al-Sālih's death, either 1297 or 1307 AD, depending on the interpretation of the word *intiqāl* (1963: 10, 29, 30-1). In effect he discreetly suggests that it might imply a dating from the death of the Prophet. The issue was briefly reviewed by Drewes in his 1968 article and he concluded that in this context *intiqāl* was more or less equivalent to *hijra*, since *intaqala* means to emigrate or pass over. For Drewes the phrase resulted from a poor command of Arabic (1968: 450). The counterside to this argument is the fact that the verb is used earlier in the same epitaph to refer specifically to the death of al-Sālih; Line 4 begins *al-ladhī intaqala min ramadān*, that is "who passed away in *Ramadān*." The term is regularly used in Arabic epitaphs of the period to indicate a person's passing from this world to the next and appears in the

phrase *intaqala min dār al-fanāʾ ilá dār al-baqāʾ*. For the moment it is unclear whether this is no more than an unusual alternative phraseology for the *hijra*, or indeed whether it suggests an instance in which years were counted from the death of the Prophet.[17]

Whatever the explanation for the phraseology *min intiqāl al-nabawiyya* in al-Sālih's epitaph, its use is highly unusual and not consistent with other fifteenth and sixteenth century epitaphs in the region. This remarkable phraseology suggests that the text was in all likelihood copied from an earlier source, this could have been an earlier gravestone but also conceivably from another written source.[18]

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[17] The most explicit evidence for this comes from two late-twelfth century copper plate grants from the Maldives which record the foundation of various mosques, and the details of provision for their upkeep and income, after the conversion of the previously Buddhist Maldivian rulers to Islam. Both grants are written in Divehi and I rely therefore on two recent edited readings and translations of the documents. After the customary opening praises of the ruler, the date at which the grants are given is clearly stated. First of all the date is given in terms of the ruler's regnal years, this takes place in the third and fourth regnal years of Sri Gadanaditya respectively (Maniku and Wijayawardhana 1986: 1 and Maniku 1982: 2), after this, an Islamic date is given. However, the term *hijra* is not employed and instead we find the phrases "when five hundred and eighty two years had elapsed since the noble Prophet Muhammad's ascension to heaven" (Maniku and Wijay-awardhana 1986: 3) and "in the five hundred and eighty third year of the Great Prophet, Sri Mahammadu's' Renunciation of this world and Ascention [sic] to Paradise" (Maniku 1982: 10). The line "Sri Mahammadu's' Renunciation of this world" is particularly redolent of Buddhist discourse and textual conventions for referring to the Buddha and is clearly associated with his death since the text immediately refers to his ascension to Paradise. The editors of the first grant, the so-called Ishdoo Loamaafaanu grant, dated 582, note that "this is in keeping with the Buddhist method of dating from Mahaparinirvana (death of Lord Buddha)" and give an equivalent date of 1195-96 AD, calculating this from 633 AD, not 622 AD as would be the case with the *hijri* system (Maniku and Wijayawardhana 1986: ii). The Maldivian examples suggest that the Islamic concept of *hijra* became conflated with Buddhist calendrical systems based on the date of death of the Buddha, and was under-stood not in the sense of a physical movement by living persons between cities, but in a much more ethereal sense, as the migration of the soul from the body, from this life to the hereafter, i.e. death. Unfortunately, the grants are published with minimal commentary and both would benefit from a closer examination of this phraseology and its relationship to the Sri Lankan Buddhist grants with which they seem to share so many features. My thanks to Ian Proudfoot for tempering my more imaginative interpretations of what is so far only very sparse evidence.

[18] It is difficult at present to establish whether this is the case for the entire epigraphic program since this aspect of the study of *batu Aceh* is still in its infancy for north Sumatra (though well studied for the Malaysian examples). The poem about the transitory nature of life found on the reverse of al-Sālih's headstone also appears on those of Mansūr Shāh of

Although this new context of manufacture places a few healthy question marks around the epitaph and inscription program, I see no reason to doubt the basic data contained in the epitaph since essentials such as al-Sālih's name are corroborated by a wide range of other sources, both epigraphic and historical. I am more interested in the new questions that arise from being able to establish a date of manufacture for al-Sālih's tombstones. How was al-Sālih's grave seen and used by later generations and succeeding rulers? The following discussion begins to explore these new layers of interpretation and meaning.

Founding Sultans and the Legitimization of Rule Among Early Sumatran Sultanates

If al-Sālih's tombstones were manufactured a good two centuries after his death, who commissioned them and why? The refurbishment of any grave undoubtedly constituted a meritorious act that would have conferred *baraka* or blessings on the patron and they may ostensibly have been produced simply to replace a lost or damaged grave marker. However, this is not just any grave, it is a royal grave and the grave of the man whom the *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* names as "the king who first embraced Islam in the land of Pasai" (*Hikayat* 1960: 109), it is a grave laden with particular religious and political significance. To refurbish it would have been both an act of respect and reverence but also an act which had potential religious and political meaning. It is unfortunate that a narrower window for their date of manufacture cannot be established at present since the fifty year bracket 1470s to 1520s straddles the decline of the Sultanate of Samudra-Pasai and the simultaneous rise of the Sultanate of Aceh. Al-Sālih's tombstones could equally well have been commissioned by one of the last Sultans of Samudra-Pasai as they could have been ordered by one of the early Acehnese Sultans after the 1524 conquest. Either way, it is clear that al-Sālih's grave was the object of a major renovation during a period of important power shifts in north Sumatra. Such a gesture would have been as appropriate to one of the later Sultans of Samudra-Pasai, where a dizzying succession of rivals

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Malacca and on other later *batu Aceh*, it may thus be an innovation introduced with the making of the new tombstone pair. The program of Qur'anic verses on the footstone—verses 22 to 24 of *sūra* 59, *sūra al-hashr*, concluding with the short benedictory phrase *sadaqa allah al-ʿalī al-ʿazīm wa sadaqa rasūlihi al-karīm* and the *shahāda* or profession of faith carried in the oval panels at the top of each side—are also commonly used in funerary contexts and thus require further study.

and usurpers fought to establish supremacy (Alves 1994), as to one of the early Sultans of Aceh, intent upon legitimizing their new rule over a venerable regional predecessor.

Anthropological research has highlighted the importance of ancestor worship and founders cults in Indonesia's pre-Islamic societies and has explored some of the ways that this characteristic persisted through the adoption of universal religions such as Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity (Chambert-Loir and Reid 2002, also Tannenbaum and Kammerer 2003). The cult of deceased kings amongst Muslim societies appears to have been strongest in Java and Chambert-Loir states that "it seems that [...] royal cemeteries like those of Gunung Jati and Imogiri are peculiar to Java" (Chambert-Loir and Reid 2002: 138). There is certainly no evidence for a popular veneration of either al-Sālih's grave, or any other early royal graves in north Sumatra, on the scale seen in Java. Nevertheless, graves of founding fathers and early converts may well have been used to mark lineage during later periods and it seems viable to suggest that the renovation of al-Sālih's resting place in the late fifteenth/early sixteenth century should be seen as belonging to wider practices of legitimization via the recollection or even fabrication of royal ancestors and predecessors.

Unfortunately, information about this early period of north Sumatran history is not sufficiently detailed to record such practices in relationship to graves; however, legitimacy and lineage are near universal constants and we find them underlined and emphasized more generally in the history of the kingdom of Samudra-Pasai. The story of Pasai's founding father is known to have been current at least during the sixteenth century, since a copy of the *Sulalat al-Salatin* which includes this account is known to have been compiled in 1612. The *Hikayat raja-raja Pasai* is currently believed to date to the late fourteenth or fifteenth century. Both accounts stress the pure pedigree of Islam in Samudra-Pasai since it is first revealed by the Prophet himself in a dream to the future convert, and then carried directly from Mecca in the person of a *shaykh*. But both accounts also build up al-Sālih's lineage and the legitimacy of his rule by linking his kingdom to other Islamic polities in the region through territorial conquest and intermarriage. Thus al-Sālih receives material assistance and blessing from the brothers of Sultān al-Nāsir of Rimba Jembi—an as yet unidentified polity already converted to Islam—whom he eventually defeats and whose kingdom he takes over; he then marries a princess from the neighboring Muslim kingdom of Perlak (*Hikayat* 1960: 115-6 and 120-3). The maintenance of the *laqab* al-Zāhir and the *kunya* Zayn al-Dīn among many of the

later sultans of Samudra-Pasai should perhaps also be interpreted as strong legitimizing practices.

Richer information exists for the later Sultanate of Aceh and it is possible to examine in more detail the ways in which gravestones and cemetery visits were used to mark lineage and signal legitimacy. Overall, the memory of Samudra appears to have lived on within the Sultanate of Aceh more strongly than that of other conquered polities such as Barus, Daya, Lamri, Pidie, Perlak, or Aru. It seems significant that a letter issued by the Acehnese Sultan ʿAlaʾ al-Dīn in 1602 AD still identified Samudra as a separate component of his domains, naming him as the lord "who holds the throne of Aceh and Samudra and all the countries appended thereto" (Laffan 2005: 60-1). This Samudran connection appears to have been maintained physically too, at least by Sultān Iskandar Thānī, through the practice of *ziyāra* or religious pilgrimage, since the *Bustan al-Salatin* recounts that he visited the graves of the Sultans of Samudra in 1048/1638-9 (Kern 1999: 279a). The latter Sultan also employed *batu Aceh* to mark his lineage and the *Bustan* relates how Iskandar sent tombstones to Pahang for the graves of his relatives (Van Ronkel 1920). The important point here is that rather than commission or organize markers to be made locally in Pahang, the gravestones were sent from Aceh, in so doing the Sultan not only established a donative connection between Aceh and Pahang that linked him to his ancestors, but by marking them as distinctly Acehnese, he created a clear visual signal of their relationship to the Sultanate of Aceh. Although these examples are too late to help contextualize al-Sālih's tombstones, it seems highly probable that these practices of legitimization pre-date the seventeenth century. Better fine tuning of *batu Aceh* typological sequences should one day help narrow down the date at which al-Sālih's stones were manufactured and anchor our interpretation more firmly either within the history of the final decades of the Sultanate of Samudra-Pasai, or within the opening decades of its successor, the Sultanate of Aceh.

As this discussion has shown, the focus on tombstones as repositories of "key" epitaphs has eclipsed the wealth of data that comes from a much more holistic approach to tombstones as "integral cultural products" and an understanding of them as complex productions which belong to both the visual/material/non-verbal and the textual/verbal fields of inquiry.[19]

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[19] Even within the strict epigraphic approach much work remains to be done beyond epitaph texts, on epigraphic programs, scripts, and language. We also need to get over our obsession with elite grave markers and begin deciphering the epitaphs of non-royal figures.

Even such iconic grave markers as that of al-Malik al-Sālih have not even been sufficiently analyzed in terms of fundamental characteristics such as their material, design, or decoration; even more critically, typological approaches which set these single tombstones within larger production groups and sequences have not been consistently or thoroughly applied. The problem is by no means exclusive to Southeast Asian Islamic history and epigraphy, even in regional specializations such as Ottoman epigraphy where cemeteries and epitaphs have been fundamental sources for social history, textual concerns have generally prevailed over visual/material/non-verbal fields of inquiry. The example of al-Malik al-Sālih's grave marker mainly leads to a discussion of the alternative interpretations that arise after material and visual data are added to its textual content. However, it is also worth underlining the enormous potential of even uninscribed tombstones to contribute to various areas of historical inquiry.

Tombstones and the Social and Economic History of Early Islamic Southeast Asia

Writing a Richer History of Early Islam in Southeast Asia

The extensive Islamic cemeteries of maritime Southeast Asia represent an enormous and vastly underexploited resource of the early history of Islamic Southeast Asia. Certainly their epigraphic potential is by no means exhausted, as al-Sālih's epitaph has demonstrated. There is no doubt that amongst the cemeteries of Sumatra and Java, many "key" epitaphs remain to be deciphered and many fascinating poetic and Quranic programs remain to be studied. But this particular challenge is in hand, being the focus of mainly French work in Java (Kalus and Guillot 2004), at Barus (Guillot 2003), and elsewhere in Sumatra.

The greater challenge is posed by developing and implementing a more holistic approach to these tombstones as "integral cultural products," and eventually to the cemeteries as a whole. As manufactured objects, tombstones carry valuable information about the processes and context of their making, information that ultimately reflects larger social and economic conditions. As this article has shown, much fundamental documentation

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The French epigrapher L. C. Damais made important progress toward this for the Acehnese cemeteries but his work was only published in a summative form (Damais 1968); for an attempt to continue this work, see Lambourn 2004b.

work and basic typological analysis remains to be carried out in Aceh and this situation is typical of most parts of Southeast Asia.[20] Many uninscribed tombstones remain to be documented. Work on quarry and production sites is practically non-existent, research on the organization of craft production and manufacturing processes is only in its infancy. Although stylistic evidence suggests an active circulation of ideas and design, probably in the person of stone carvers and scribes, little of this has been documented and interpreted. All these problems hold the hope of bringing important new data for the socio-economic history of the early Islamic period.

It is also clear that tombstones were produced across maritime Southeast Asia in extremely large numbers. This volume of production makes them a strong source for constructing relative chronologies to function alongside the more common ceramic typologies currently in use. Informal uses of this technique during Edmund McKinnon's recent research in Aceh have confirmed that ceramic and tombstone chronologies often correlate (E. McKinnon, personal communications). Tombstones can thus reinforce our understanding of the periods and sequences of settlement and development in the early Islamic period.

It is also becoming abundantly clear that tombstones circulated around maritime Southeast Asia with unparalleled complexity and frequency. In this region they became traded objects in a way that is very different from the occasional overseas commission seen in the rest of the Indian Ocean. Preliminary analysis of their patterns of distribution and exchange suggests that they "behave" more like ceramic distributions than known tombstone distribution patterns. Because tombstones are objects functionally associated with Islamic burial, in a way that ceramics are not, this suggests that a careful disentangling of tombstone types and production centers holds a key to understanding not simply the "tombstone trade" but the routes and phases of Islamization across the region. In an area where data of any kind is so sparse we cannot really afford to ignore this opportunity to write a richer history of early Islam in Southeast Asia.

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[20] Perhaps the most encouraging exception is Malaysia where collaborative work between the EFEO and Malaysian archaeological authorities has led to a number of well published surveys of cemeteries, see Perret, Razak and Kalus 1999 and Perret, Razak and Kalus 2004. Although Bruneian scholarship on tombstones is growing, epigraphy remains heavily tied to the imperatives of constructing royal genealogies and uninscribed markers are not consistently recorded.

A switch to a more material focus in the history of Islam in Southeast Asia also resonates with the increased interest over the last fifteen to twenty years in material culture as a source for the history of religion, and conversely in the interest of archaeologists in the archaeology of religion. Tim Insoll's work on the early spread of Islam in west Africa through his work at Gao in Mali, as indeed Mark Horton's excavations at the site of Shanga on the Swahili coast of east Africa, illustrate the kind of data that excavations can yield about religious practices and conversion processes, as well as about a wide range of issues from urban form, to trade, craft, and industry.[21] The successes of archaeology for African Islam will undoubtedly make historians of early Islam in Southeast Asia green with envy, but a better use of material culture does not have to begin on this large scale, indeed in many parts of Southeast Asia the particular climatic conditions may mean that comparable archaeological material has simply not survived. As this article demonstrates, a better use of material culture can begin on a much smaller level, even at that of a single object.

Crossing the Visual/Textual, Material/Textual, Non-verbal/Verbal Gap

As always there is no single explanation for why tombstones have not been used more holistically before now.

The delay in seeing tombstones as "integrated cultural products" must be due in large part to the dominance of historical, text focused approaches and methods, in an area that is in any case substantially under-researched. It is not easy to resist the lure of text and it might be helpful to think about the period before 1500 as if it were without written sources, as if it were literally pre-history (defined as any period before the existence of written records). Given the absence of certain dating for many fundamental texts such as the *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* or the *Sulalat al-Salatin*, this reconceptualization is not perhaps as radical as it may seem at first, it may help us switch our thinking away from our obsession with dates, names, and titles, and toward writing the history of early Islam from material remains, applying archaeological and material culture methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Undoubtedly part of the problem is one of training. Academia is a hyper-literate and hyper-textualized sub-culture within (generally) already highly literate and textualized societies. Even if developments in twentieth

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[21] See Insoll 2001; Insoll 1996; Insoll *et al.* 2000; and Horton *et al.* 1996.

century literary theory and philosophy have helped underline the ultimate unreliability of text as something re-created at each reading, to many text still appears to communicate far more clearly than a "dumb" artefact. Archaeology, art history, material culture, and visual culture studies have all developed as fields of inquiry specialized in non-textual and non-verbal material and its interpretation, but the approaches and methods that allow "us" to interpret this material are often not taught outside our disciplines. By contrast art historians, historians of material and visual culture, and archaeologists almost always receive textual training, certainly once they progress to postgraduate study. The end result is that the fundamental visual/material or non-verbal approaches and methods most often remain a closed book to those outside these disciplines.

To a lesser extent, this neglect is also due to the varying fate of typological sequencing as a method in different disciplines. Whilst the typological method is taught as a key tool in archaeology (see Renfrew and Bahn 2004, for example); in visual and material culture it has increasingly been dismissed as an empirical, nineteenth century enterprise that hinders discussion and research more than it advances them. The problem here is not really with the method in itself but with the final aim to which it is put. At its worst, the making of typologies can become an end in itself, a game of complex ordering and compartmentalization that is often flawed and many times fails to lead on to more sophisticated interpretation. It is this flawed application of typology that has perhaps maligned the method as a whole in the areas of visual and material culture.

I also suspect that in many areas of western material culture familiarity has to some extent bred contempt, typological sequences have long been established and are used almost implicitly, adding to the impression that the method is long past its sell-by date. However, in areas of non-western material culture where many categories of artefact—as, for example, our tombstones—remain untouched by the grand nineteenth century empirical enterprise, typological sequencing remains a key primary tool upon which to build further analysis. As such it deserves better recognition and careful application. Obviously typological sequencing is not an end in itself, but a tool through which to begin to ask much more interesting and important questions. Where were Islamic tombstones being produced, in what volumes, and when? Who was making them and for whom were they made? How were they made and designed? What did they mean and how did they function? Answering these questions will contribute far more to our understanding of the Islamization of maritime Southeast Asia and the

growth of Muslim polities there than if we simply persist in seeking the names and dates of deceased rulers.

Writing a richer history of early Islam in Southeast Asia is a multidisciplinary task, one in which historians and epigraphers, archaeologists, and historians of material culture must necessarily collaborate, learn a little of each other's disciplines and methods, and above all respect each other's particular skills. To do this effectively it is further clear to me that archaeologists and historians of material culture also need to be better at communicating what they do and especially how they do it. But perhaps historians should also be better at listening to us and learning to see what we do. This obviously involves trying to explain our methods and analysis in an open and clear manner, finding ways to demonstrate our particular skills, and explaining what they are. It also involves publishing in venues not normally associated with our specialization. I have tried to do both these things in publishing here in the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*. After all, if such an encounter could have helped Jean-Pierre Moquette understand that the principal problem with al-Sālih's tombstones was not their chronological inconsistency but a much more fundamental typological inconsistency, one of the great misunderstandings about the "origin" of Islam in Southeast Asia might have never begun.

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